

#StillWeRise: The sociolinguistics of race, inequalities, and athlete activist identities in Formula 1 social media

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1. Introduction

This chapter examines the sociolinguistics of race, inequalities, and identities in the understudied yet globally influential motorsport of Formula 1 (F1). Undertaking a qualitative, case study approach, we apply a multimodal discourse analytical (MMDA) framework to language and semiotic resources used in social media posts by the first and thus far only Black F1 driver, Sir Lewis Hamilton, who holds the record for the most wins in the sport. We focus in particular on Hamilton's feed on the international image and video-sharing platform Instagram, where he currently has 30.3 million followers, the most of any F1 driver. Our interest is on how Hamilton uses a series of semiotic and multimodal discourse strategies to construct a Black athlete activist identity which rejects social exclusion in F1 and racial injustice in wider society. We also demonstrate how Hamilton advocates for and negotiates Black inclusion and racial justice in F1 and wider society as a vision for the future using linguistic, multimodal, and social semiotic strategies.

Data has been selected from the 2020 season because this unique time period offered a useful context in which to investigate the sociolinguistics of identity in motorsport and online media. Firstly, it took place during the global Covid-19 pandemic, at a time when much of the world was still in a sustained period of lockdown, with fans unable to attend sporting events, including F1. Therefore, we argue that, without being able to physically attend any races as spectators, fans were ever-more reliant on the media and social media particularly to keep them connected to the sport. Secondly, and most importantly, 6 weeks before the 2020 F1 season started, a video of a white police officer murdering George Floyd, a Black man who was in police custody in Minneapolis in the United States, sparked protests against racism and marked the significant growth of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. As TePoel and Nauright (2021: 695) have noted, race relations in sport "have a renewed urgency and intensity due to BLM and the COVID-19 pandemic, shining a light on continued inequities and injustices in sport and society".

We focus on a series of posts from Hamilton's Instagram profile. We examine how, as a high-profile sporting celebrity, Hamilton uses his Instagram feed to partake in socio-political activism. We focus in particular on highlighting the complex array of multimodal discourse strategies that he uses to construct a Black athlete identity for himself, and to position himself against racism in wider society and the exclusion of Black identities in F1. We analyse Hamilton's posts by locating social semiotic elements and the language strategies selected in the social media feeds through an MMDA approach (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021), further contextualised through sports media studies (Wenner 1998), thus expanding the heavily under-researched area of F1 sports language research (see File and Schnurr 2018). Through our analyses of the textual choices of Hamilton's Instagram posts, combined with the social semiotics of how significant sporting artefacts are displayed and discussed, we aim to demonstrate how Hamilton uses several discourse strategies to construct a leading Black athlete activist identity to engage audience members, and to advocate for racial inclusion in F1 and activism in racial justice movements.

We will now outline the background to the study in section 2, focusing on establishing the sport-media-identity nexus and its relationship to F1, alongside an interdisciplinary consideration of social in/exclusion, and Black identities and activism in sport. The methodology

of the study is given in section 3, and the data analysis of the Instagram posts are presented in section 4. It is our intention that the findings can be of applied linguistic value to those working within F1 and sports, and we discuss this further in section 5, along with emphasising the role that sports personalities can play in human rights activism through the identities they perform on social media platforms and in sporting contexts. We conclude with a consideration of future directions for studies of F1 and the sociolinguistics of identity in relation to athlete activism via social media.

2. Background

In this section, we outline our key terms and areas of study, covering the relationship between sport and the media, Black athlete activism, identity construction on social media, and social inclusion and exclusion. We also outline previous research on F1 and characterise the under-researched area of linguistics in F1 to date. It is well-established in sports studies that media and sport have a complex dialogic relationship. Wenner (1998: xiii) argues that this is a result of “the cultural fusing of sport with communication”, caused in part by the rapid mediatisation of sport, and “the interaction of institutions, texts and audiences” (1998: 9). The relationship between media and sport is increasingly important (Rowe 2009), especially with the emergence of digital and online forms, which have deepened the wider influence and reach of sport. Digital social media features such as hashtags have also received scholarly attention recently due to their prominence as audience engagement strategies, therefore highlighting social media as a critical medium for sports (Horky and Meyer 2021; Wang 2021). Identity, defined here as “the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz and Hall 2010: 18), has long been viewed as a key feature in sports media, therefore forming a prominent sport-media-identity nexus. Despite the dominance of political neutrality discourse in sports, sport has also historically acted as a fertile site for socio-political messaging, and particularly those supporting marginalised and under-represented identities. This has been observable in the case of Black activism in sport; since Edwards’ (1969) influential work, Black identity, socio-political activism and sport have had a complex relationship in sporting contexts and their scholarship.

In our analysis of the inclusion of the Black athlete activist identity in F1, we follow the United Nations’ (2016: 20) definition of social inclusion as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights”. Issues of social inclusion are particularly relevant to F1, as the sport is notorious for its exclusivity and high expenditure. Hamilton identifies as the “only Black, working-class person in his field” (Mission 44 2021), defining F1 as a “billionaire boys’ club” (BBC 2021). While the sport does not openly discriminate in recruiting drivers, F1 has historically been infamous for the exclusion of marginalised groups, including women, and people of colour. This diminishes the supposed global influence of the sport, which currently includes races in every inhabited continent excluding Africa.

However, most of the pre-existing social scientific research into F1 has focused predominantly on the impact of the sport on host countries and local communities from sociocultural or economic perspectives (Cheng and Jarvis 2010; Gezici and Er 2016), or on criticisms around F1’s environmental impact (Miller 2016). F1 also provides complexities for the sport-media-identity nexus: teams and drivers use sports gear as important semiotic devices to promote sponsors and develop their personal sporting brands, including logos on race helmets and overalls, and team-issued merchandise worn by drivers during media interviews. The body is thus used as a key medium in the sport, creating a complex sport-media-identity nexus, providing excellent opportunities for multimodal linguistic analysis.

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Much of the research conducted on athlete activist identities, and the relationship between sports and race more broadly has focused on more traditional forms of broadcast and written media (Farrington et al. 2012; Lamb 2016) or has come from fields outside of sociolinguistics (see Carrington and McDonald 2001; Nauright and Wiggins 2016). However, by highlighting the importance of online social media analysis, some scholars are beginning to examine online media to explore identity through notions of the sporting celebrity and athlete activism. LeBron James (basketball) and Colin Kaepernick (American football), whose anti-racism activism is similar to Hamilton's approach, have notably received media and academic attention as athlete activists for their platforming of Black identity and social movements including BLM (Coombs and Cassilo 2017; Marston 2020). However, Hirschfelder (2020) argues that media representations of Black sporting celebrities who are established as athlete activists can be damaging as they often isolate Black athlete activists within their sporting contexts, thus maintaining and reproducing discourses of social exclusion.

Only a handful of studies in media and language research has examined F1 or Hamilton's role as a leading athlete. Farrington et al. (2012) discuss racism towards Hamilton during one race, or Grand Prix (GP), as well as accusations of Hamilton using the 'race card' during a post-race broadcast interview in 2011, where he joked that he may have received a penalty during the race because of his Black identity, explicitly highlighting the impact of Black exclusion in F1. File and Schnurr (2018) approach the latter incident from the linguistic perspective of failed humour in sports discourse. They focus on the mixed responses Hamilton received from other participants, including the interviewer and online audience, noting again the reception of the incident by critics as Hamilton 'playing the race card'. Hamilton's comment about his race in 2011 took place almost a decade before the focus of the current study, where for the first time he consistently makes explicit his sociopolitical stance against racism and inequalities (Younge 2021). More recently, Tyrkkö and Limatius (2019) have focused on team radio communication within F1 from a corpus linguistics perspective, thus further demonstrating the emergence of F1 as a fertile site for linguistic analysis. However, despite an emerging interest by sociolinguists and discourse analysts into the languages, discourses, and identities of sport (Caldwell et al. 2016; Butterworth 2021), racial justice activism in motorsport and sports generally continues to remain understudied in these disciplines, a knowledge gap which this study intends to address.

3. Methodology

In a media interview with sociologist Gary Younge, Hamilton reflected on the start of the 2020 season being a critical moment for his own position as a Black athlete. He comments that the BLM movement triggered the following:

This wrath of emotions came up and I couldn't contain myself...I was in tears. And this stuff came up that I'd suppressed over all these years. And it was so powerful and sad and also releasing. And I thought, 'I can't stay quiet. I need to speak out because there are people experiencing what I'm experiencing, or 10 times worse. Or 100 times worse. And they need me right now. And so when I did speak out, that was me letting the Black community know: 'I hear you and I stand with you.'

(Younge 2021: 1)

Because of the importance of this particular moment in time to Hamilton and his developing role as a Black athlete activist, we decided to focus our analysis at this pivotal point

in Hamilton's F1 career. We have focused on the opening two races of the 2020 season which took place in Austria, analysing Instagram posts from the Austrian and Styrian Grands Prix. Our data consists of the first Instagram posts where Hamilton deliberately uses the linguistic, multimodal, and social semiotic conventions of the platform and a series of F1 artefacts, including helmets, visual footage and clothing to comment directly on racial in/exclusion and racial justice in F1 and contemporary society.

We have also selected these Instagram posts as they were posted at the start of the 2020 season where Hamilton, for the first time, deliberately backgrounds his usual stance as a successful F1 driver, to instead foreground his identity as a Black athlete activist. An F1 race weekend typically covers Thursday through Sunday, during which F1 drivers, all of whom have active social media accounts, often post on each day. It is also common for drivers to post reflections about their race performance on Monday, to explain any incidents that may have occurred and to publicly thank team members. Despite often following this trend, Hamilton notably abstains from posting reflections exclusively or explicitly about sporting performance for the first two races of the 2020 season post-race, curating his social media feeds instead around activism, particularly focusing on BLM. Excluding the first post in the data set, Extract 1, which marks the beginning of the season through Hamilton's 2020 season helmet reveal post, the dataset consists of two posts released shortly after the two races. The first race of this season also saw the launch of an all-black car for Hamilton's team Mercedes including the command 'End Racism' written on the car, and the launch of F1's #WeRaceAsOne initiative, which involved the inclusion of rainbows on cars to honour COVID-19 frontline workers, a manifesto detailing sustainability goals, and "visual displays of support in the fight against racism" (Formula 1 2020). This initiative also included some drivers taking the knee before races, and was controversial due to the divided opinion of drivers. While #WeRaceAsOne has received some scholarly attention (Khan 2021), this study addresses Hamilton's reflections on these demonstrations through fine-grained analysis.

The sociocultural influence of BLM across several continents demonstrates the important role played by Hamilton as not only the sport's most popular personality, but as the emerging athlete activist striving for Black inclusion in a predominantly white sport. As we will demonstrate further below, through his social semiotic choices within the sporting context, including crash helmets and pre-race clothing, as well as embedding BLM into his social media persona, Hamilton uses the start of the 2020 season to align himself and his team directly with racial activism. By locating our study within this context, we aim to illustrate how sports professionals utilise textual and visual strategies online and in sporting contexts to advocate for social inclusion through engagements with audiences and constructions of their own social, professional, and activist identities. Therefore, our analyses will demonstrate how social media and professional sporting platforms can be used to further social inclusion causes. This adds to the growing area of professional communication research which examines how linguistic analysis can be used as a tool of political intervention (see Mullany 2020), as well as having practical implications for sporting professionals and sports media practitioners who are interested in how social media sites can be used as successful platforms to further activism and advocacy around issues of inclusion for mass international audiences.

3.1 Analytical framework

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In order to illustrate the strategies that Hamilton used in his posts to position himself as an emerging Black athlete activist, we deemed a qualitative, multimodal discourse analytical approach (MMDA) necessary to ensure that the intricacies of these strategies could be given full attention. We combine this framework with the analysis of social semiotic elements present within the images, including clothing, gear, hair, logos, and other forms of non-verbal communication and kinesics, including body language and gestures, e.g. taking a knee and raised fists. These are accompanied by discourse analyses of written captions under images, hashtags, emojis, and slogans to investigate how Hamilton uses his Instagram feed to construct identities for himself and his team, and precisely how he disseminates his activist messaging through the discourse strategies that have been chosen.

We integrate a series of key principles from sociolinguistics and discourse analysis in our analytical framework. Central to our analyses of Hamilton’s Instagram posts are Bucholtz and Hall’s (2010) principle of indexicality (Ochs 1992), and Fairclough’s ([1989] 2014) conceptualisations of intertextuality and synthetic personalisation. We follow Bucholtz and Hall’s (2010: 21) assertion that identity emerges through “indexical processes” which includes identity indexes in the form of explicit use of identity labels, implicatures, and presuppositions, and “the use of linguistic structures and systems that are ideologically associated with specific personas and groups”. In the context of our analyses, we demonstrate how Hamilton makes use of certain identity indexes through social semiotic elements such as hair and clothing. We are defining intertextuality in this chapter as the articulation of other texts (written or otherwise) within different texts (Fairclough 2014). As such, our analyses of Hamilton’s Instagram posts explores intertextual links that Hamilton embeds within his posts to notable Black athletes and activism, and Black identity indexes to represent himself as a notable Black athlete activist. Finally, synthetic personalisation is defined as “the simulation of private, face-to-face, person-to-person discourse in public mass-audience discourse” (Fairclough 2014: 65), and we analyse how Hamilton uses textual and visual synthetic personalisation strategies to establish an argumentative rhetorical style and engage his audiences to highlight his racial justice messaging.

The discourse analyses of captions are supported by van Leeuwen’s (2008) network for the critical discourse analysis of the representation of social actors and legitimation in discourse. For the MMDA approach, we follow Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2021) model. MMDA provides an ideal framework for qualitative social semiotic resources including videos, photographs, and text, with these resources including displays of the body such as clothing and various sports accessories which are central to F1 Instagram posts. The Instagram posts primarily include representations of human participants in the images, predominantly Hamilton himself; we therefore focus more specifically on features including gaze, angle, and size of frame. Table 1 summarises the key analytical terms which we have used to code the visual features in our data, adapted from Kress and van Leeuwen (2021).

Table 1: Summary of key effects and features under a multimodal discourse analytical framework, adapted from Kress and van Leeuwen (2021)

Demand	Gaze at the viewer
Offer	Absence of gaze at the viewer

Personal distance	Close shot
Social distance	Medium shot
Impersonal distance	Long shot
Involvement	Frontal angle
Detachment	Oblique angle
Viewer power	High angle
Equality	Eye-level angle
Participant power	Low angle
Action orientation	Frontal view neutralizing central perspective
Observer orientation	Top-down view neutralizing central perspective

We will now analyse the Instagram data from the two GP in Austria, starting with the longest post, used to launch Hamilton's 2020 season.

4. Analysis

Our analyses of Hamilton's Instagram posts aim to demonstrate how a series of multimodal discourse strategies work together strategically to establish an argumentative rhetorical style designed to engage audience members, to raise their awareness of racial inequality and simultaneously to advocate activism in racial justice movements. The first Instagram post which fulfils our data collection criteria went live on 2 July 2020. It consists of video footage where Hamilton reveals his new helmet. This is the first post which explicitly launches Hamilton's activist stance for the 2020 season, and so it is analysed in full.

Extract 1: Austrian GP, Media Day post, with embedded video, 02/07/2020

https://www.instagram.com/tv/CCJu_I7hXqF/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Caption: Still WE Rise 🇺🇸 #BlackLivesMatter

Video transcript:

1 *[close up shots of helmet details]*

2 *[Hamilton shown in front of his poster at the Mercedes motorhome, wearing a black and green*
3 *'END RACISM' t-shirt under a checkered overshirt, in a face mask and sunglasses, looking to*
4 *the side]*

5 *[Hamilton shown in the motorhome, wearing jewellery, black mask, and Mercedes team gear]*

6 *[Hamilton looks down and then directly at camera]*

7 Hamilton: I've just arrived at the track here in Austria. For a long time we've been planning
8 for uhm the livery change with the car... uh for the suit change... and I'd also designed... and
9 my helmet is black... and purple this year.

10 *[holds helmet up to the level of his shoulders and towards the camera]*

11 So I've only just seen this for the first time... *[pauses, looks at helmet]*

12 And uh, normally my helmet is white, my suit is white, and obviously the car is silver. On the top
13 here *[points at BLM raised fist logo and BLM writing with index]*

14 *[camera back on Hamilton who alternates between looking down at the helmet and directly at*
15 *the camera]*

16 *[camera alternates between helmet details and Hamilton]*

17 This is the whole reason that the helmet has changed its colour, like my suit has and also the
18 car.

19 It's supporting equality above all and just really continuing to solidify that important message.

20 As we currently now have the mic and people are starting to listen so it's an opportunity to
21 continue to push that message and really hold people accountable... brands, and the teams at
22 Formula 1, and everybody here needs to be held accountable and be open to educating
23 themselves, to being open to uhm understanding why the Black Lives movement is happening
24 and why around the world we need to be pushing for equality. Uhm because it's not good
25 enough. Even if someone says to you 'we've been doing something' uhm or 'we've been trying'
26 *[shakes head side to side]* they need to try harder because it is still a big issue that the world is
27 fighting, you know, 60 years later after Martin Luther King uhm was fighting for it and gave his
28 life so uhm...

29 That's what it's about I think, I've kept the purple from what I've planned to start with the season.

30 It's my favourite colour and uhm... yeah I hope you get to see it when I'm in the car

Starting with the post's caption, the first piece of language the viewer sees, it is notable that Hamilton makes an intertextual reference to Maya Angelou's poem *Still I Rise*, an iconic piece of Black literature, with a strategic pronoun shift, changing the singular personal pronoun "I" in Angelou's poem to collective pronoun "we". This pronoun change draws attention to a shift from individual to collective Black identity. Hamilton's use of intertextuality to index Black identity is further seen in the addition of the raised fist emoji in the caption, in the darker brown colour of the five different options, arguably signifying Hamilton's mixed-race Black identity. This emoji is another reference to a key moment in Black athlete activism: the first notable use of the Black Power salute in sports, when African-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised a black-gloved fist on the podium at the 1968 Summer Olympics. The emoji also works as an intertextual device to align Hamilton with BLM, as the gesture has become a prominent symbol of the movement. In this short caption, Hamilton positions himself with two key moments in Black histories and assigns himself the authority to change Angelou's original phrase, arguably demonstrating an awareness of the power of his voice and platform. In his reference to the Black Power salute, he explicitly aligns himself with fellow Black activist athletes and BLM. Finally, Hamilton's use of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag shows him explicitly positioning himself with the movement, whilst simultaneously targeting future audiences for potential engagement through the hashtag choice.

This is paralleled by the video transcript of Hamilton demonstrating the motivation behind stylistic choices for the 2020 season, including switching from the famous Mercedes silver to black in honour of BLM. In claiming that the change was planned "for a long time" (line 7), he also uses collective pronoun "we" to refer to the Mercedes team. His switch to the singular pronoun "I" (line 8) suggests that while Hamilton was active in the Mercedes team's stylistic decisions, he was responsible for his helmet design. This highlights Hamilton's awareness of the power of his platform both on social media and on track. His emphasis on the colour changes (lines 9, 12) alongside his declarative "so I've only just seen this for the first time" (line 11), as well as use of the adverb "normally" marks the uniqueness of the circumstances and creates anticipation for the explanation that follows, further emphasising the message. Hamilton is explicit in demonstrating his motivation behind the changes, directly citing the BLM movement (line 17).

Hamilton then shifts his collective personal pronoun use to refer arguably to Black communities, using a voice-related metaphor – "as we currently now have the mic" (line 20). This adds to the argument that Hamilton explicitly uses his platform to drive forward inclusive and anti-racist ideology, further and explicitly foregrounding his role as a voice for the Black community. His increased use of temporal deixis ("currently", "now") marks the intensity of the time-period as an opportunity to take action, highlighting the urgency and importance of the message. Lines 20-22 critically assign power to the Black (activist) communities with which Hamilton aligns himself through the use of the active voice in conjunction with the continued voice metaphors, thus platforming collective Black (activist) identities.

His contextualisation of anti-racist causes within F1 through naming, and collectivisation and spatial deixis ("everybody here", line 22) in his specific references to F1 settings focalises his social inclusion efforts around the sport. The switch to the active voice in discussing the awareness of racial justice issues – "...be open to educating themselves" (lines 22-23), assigns white individuals the responsibility to develop race consciousness, a prominent discourse of BLM and other social movements. Hamilton echoes this assignment of responsibility to

previously uninvolved individuals through vague and non-technical language – “...why the Black Lives movement is happening and why around the world we need to be pushing for equality” (lines 23-24). This demonstrates Hamilton’s efforts in indexing his athlete activist identity by reproducing prominent activist discourse. In order to create further audience engagement, Hamilton utilises the second person pronoun “you”, synthetically personalising his audience, and directly positioning them alongside himself in the fight against racial exclusion and injustice (line 25). Hamilton then delivers a call for action against racial exclusion and injustice to launch his season. In his use of collective third person pronoun “they” (line 26), he separates himself and his audience from those he criticises. His use of evaluative language through adjectival “big”, modifying the noun “issue”, as well as the choice of “fight” as a metaphor for anti-racist efforts, further emphasises the importance of his cause. This is also the case in line 27, where Hamilton constructs Martin Luther King Jr. as the active participant in continuing the fight metaphor. In his direct address (line 30), Hamilton finally attempts to create engagement with and attention for the sport: “I hope you get to see it when I’m in the car”, referencing the on-board camera shown during F1 broadcasts, from which the helmet would be visible, aligning F1 directly with his platforming of social inclusion causes.

Multimodal and semiotic elements in the video and on the helmet itself support the messages in the transcript through a strategic use of intertextuality. The back of Hamilton’s helmet shows the words “Still We Rise”, written in the same font as Hamilton’s “Still I Rise” tattoo. It is an adaptation of Hamilton’s previous helmets, which showed “Still I Rise” in the same font, directly referencing his past uses of the phrase. This use of font, and the shift of pronouns again demonstrates intertextuality as a key strategy in Hamilton’s call for his audiences to join in collective action against racism and for inclusion of Black identities into a sport otherwise notorious for its social exclusion. Taken together, these semiotic and textual features highlight the importance of F1 helmets as tools for Black athlete activist identity construction, with the overarching goal of promoting racial justice and inclusion.

Hamilton’s use of multimodal synthetic personalisation strategies throughout the video, including the *demand images* achieved through direct eye contact with the camera (and thus his audience), further supports his use of synthetic personalisation strategies in the transcripts, therefore further solidifying his call for racial inclusion and justice. Hamilton’s eye contact also shifts between the camera and towards the helmet, further supported by hand gestures (line 13) towards details on the helmet, inviting the viewer’s gaze to follow Hamilton’s to the BLM logo and slogan, therefore overall strengthening his call for his audience to join him and support his call for action against racial exclusion in F1 and wider society as a whole.

Extract 2: Austrian GP, post-race post on Race Day, 05/07/2020

https://www.instagram.com/p/CCReSLFBu1C/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

1 Today was an important moment for me and all the people out there who are working
2 for and hoping for change. For a more equal and just society. I may get criticism in the
3 media and elsewhere, but this fight is about equality, not politics or promotion. To me it
4 was an emotional and poignant chapter in the progress of making F1 a more diverse and
5 inclusive sport. I want a better future for our generation and the ones after us. There is
6 so much that needs to be done. No one is perfect but if we all chip in and do our part,
7 we can see change. I truly believe that. Thank you to my team for their incredible
8 support and hard work this weekend and thank you to all who supported. Let's keep
9 pushing, guys. See you next week. Love. #EndRacism #BlackLivesMatter

This post consists of two images from the first #WeRaceAsOne demonstration taking place. There are a number of features in the images used which are analysed here using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) MMDA framework. In the first image, Hamilton is shown taking a knee whilst wearing the Mercedes race overalls up to the waist, a black t-shirt with "BLACK LIVES MATTER" written in the centre in white block capitals, and a black Mercedes hat. This first image ~~minimises social distance between the viewer and Hamilton and~~ achieves a sense of equality between Hamilton and the viewer through an equal eye-level shot. The image also signifies a common cause between Hamilton and his audience through *involvement* achieved by a frontal angle, indexing collective identity and efforts in the pursuit of racial justice and inclusion. This is supported by Hamilton's choice of clothing, as the BLM t-shirt and the team-issued Mercedes hat continue to demonstrate the importance of semiotics in promoting the sport's brands and Hamilton's social inclusion causes. The *offer image* in the first photograph, presenting Hamilton to the viewer as an "item of information, object of contemplation", while traditionally considered to take power away from the participant, arguably solidifies Hamilton's position as a symbolic voice for the Black activist community (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021: 118).

The second image shows the demonstration and Hamilton taking a knee from a wider angle, with fellow drivers, five of whom are taking the knee, five of whom are not. While the image shows a higher angle, which under our MMDA model would assign the viewer power, historically, taking the knee for Black activism has been viewed as a reclamation of power in the form of opposing oppression. This demonstrates the continued importance of intertextuality and contextual knowledge in Hamilton's activism. This is also true of the wider angle and long shot, which allows the viewer to see Hamilton taking a knee amongst several athletes who are not. This echoes other athlete activists, notably Colin Kaepernick, who can be said to have popularised the gesture in sport, as well as other athletes, including footballers, who followed. Arguably, it also references the earlier instances of the gesture by Martin Luther King Jr, who took the knee during protests in Selma in 1965, and whom Hamilton has already cited in the helmet reveal post. Notably, by fitting the photograph into the square specification on Instagram, the other drivers who are kneeling in the image are cropped out (including Hamilton's teammate Valtteri Bottas) but the majority who did not kneel are included. This creates the effect that Hamilton is differentiating himself from fellow drivers, constructing a lone athlete activist identity in contradiction with his captions. This is substantiated by Hamilton's choice of clothing; he is shown to be the only driver wearing a BLM t-shirt in comparison to other drivers' End Racism t-shirts, thus directly aligning himself with the specific social movement as opposed to a more generic command.

Despite being released shortly after the race, Hamilton does not use this post's caption to reflect on race performance or his first win of the season, as would be expected, but instead reflects on the demonstrations which took place beforehand. Notably in this extract, Hamilton assigns himself the authority to represent activists in the same utterance ("all the people out there who are working for and hoping for change", line 2), indexing a collective activist identity. Hamilton's use of strategic ambiguity in line 3 ("this fight"), continuing the fight metaphor prevalent in Extract 1, enables him to reject politics and promotion claims towards his activism. This continued use of intertextuality in representing other activist voices, combined with Hamilton's repeated acknowledgment of his own individual athlete activist voice, "for me" (line 1), "to me" (line 3) combines individual and collective voices in social inclusion efforts, adding weight to Hamilton's activist messaging. This is further reflected in his use of collective personal pronouns (line 6), as well as in his expressions of gratitude towards his team and supporters (lines 7 and 8). Therefore, Hamilton's athlete activism is constructed as multilayered, as

representing individual and collective voices in racial justice efforts within both the specific sporting contexts of F1 as well as broader social inclusion movements.

Hamilton continues to develop his multilayered athlete activist identity through associations of emotive language with issues of diversity and inclusion, for instance, through the noun phrase “emotional and poignant chapter” (lines 4-5). This association legitimises and assigns authority to Hamilton’s message and his position as a leading Black athlete activist, representing himself as an athlete motivated by morality above politics or promotion as he claims his critics suggest. Such expressions of emotion alongside personalisation strategies (through direct address in lines 8-9) not only enables Hamilton to construct an emotive ethical athlete identity for himself, but also strengthens the personalised relationship with both his audience and his team, thus ultimately strengthening the outreach of his racial justice messaging. His use of the “#EndRacism” and “#BlackLivesMatter” hashtags further assist in this pursuit, marking continuity and consistency in his activist messaging using social media features as well as other semiotic elements (e.g. clothing choices), and aligning Hamilton once again with the BLM and other racial justice movements, as well as with fellow drivers through the “#EndRacism” hashtag, to solidify the foregrounding of the collective activist voice.

Our final extract, similar to Extract 2, takes the form of a written reflection of the race weekend, accompanied by an image, which was posted shortly after the Styrian GP on 12 July 2020, where Hamilton secured his first win of the season.

Extract 3: Styrian GP, post-race post on Race Day, 12/07/2020

https://www.instagram.com/p/CCjOzm4sfF6/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

The single image shows Hamilton on the Styrian GP podium in Mercedes driver overalls decorated with team sponsors, Hamilton’s car number, surname, and the British flag. Hamilton is pictured looking down, wearing braids and a black mask, with a raised right fist.

The following text accompanies the photographic image:

1 We stand together and fight 🤝 the team today took the knee which was just amazing to see
2 that together we can learn, be open minded and conscious of what's going on in the world.
3 Today we won but we have a long way to go. Thank you so much to everyone in my team, here
4 at the track and back at the factory. I hope you are proud of what we are standing for and
5 achieving together. A huge thanks to all of you #TeamLH, I appreciate all of your support and
6 your positive messages, you've really kept me going 🙏 #StillWeRise

In this extract, Hamilton's use of the first photograph strengthens his activist messaging, and his platforming of the Black athlete activist voice. The photograph shows an offer image with Hamilton looking down, with social distance achieved through medium shot size of frame, suggesting Hamilton presents the viewer with a personalised observation, which strengthens and spreads his messaging through targeted audience engagement. In this extract, the multimodal strategies found in the first photograph strengthen Hamilton's platforming of the Black athlete activist voice. Power is assigned to Hamilton through a lower eye angle, emphasising the Black Power salute. The photograph also shows an offer image, with Hamilton's gaze pointing downwards and out of shot, further guiding the viewer's gaze to the raised fist, thus increasing its power. Hamilton looking down also allows the viewer to observe his tightly braided hair, often considered to be a significant index of Black identity (Dabiri 2019). The image further adds weight to Hamilton's messaging through targeted audience engagement using involvement achieved through a frontal angle, signifying alliance and commonality between Hamilton and the viewer. Power is assigned to Hamilton through a lower eye angle, emphasising the Black Power salute. Hamilton's gaze pointing downwards and out of shot further guides the viewer's gaze to the raised fist, thus further increasing its power. Hamilton looking down also allows the viewer to observe his tightly braided hair, often considered to be a significant index of Black identity (Dabiri 2019).

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Hamilton begins the caption with a continued emphasis on inclusive collective identity and efforts (through first-person plural pronoun "we" in line 1) and "fight" as a metaphor for racial justice activism. His use of the first-person plural pronoun is ambiguous, and could be in reference to the Mercedes team, Black or activist communities, or his fans, which allows multiple groups to consider themselves as the target audience. He also continues his use of the raised fist emoji, and therefore direct reference to the Black Power salute also found in the image. The following sentence suggests that the pronoun use refers to the Mercedes team taking the knee against racism. The ambiguous use of the first-person plural pronoun continues in lines 2-3, and arguably simultaneously represent participants within F1 and wider society, thus demonstrating Hamilton's contextual and broader social sensibilities, and his advocacy for social inclusion on multiple levels. Line 2 specifically sees Hamilton using his social media platform to disseminate a call for action in the development of racial consciousness ("together we can learn, be open minded and conscious of what's going on in the world").

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The use of vague language in reference to the racial justice causes ("what's going on in the world", line 2) alludes to the design of an assumed audience with previous knowledge of the subject, emphasising the importance of collective identity in furthering social inclusion causes. The blurred lines between sport and activism in line 3 ("today we won but we have a long way to go") aligns sporting success directly with social inclusion causes. The strategic ambiguity in the use of the collective personal pronouns in this line acts as a possible synthetic personalisation strategy, bringing together different camps Hamilton aligns himself with, including his fanbase, his team, and other activists, under causes of social inclusion and racial justice. The prominence of collective identity persists alongside the repeated emotive expressions of gratitude (lines 3-6), continuing to construct personalised relationships between not only Hamilton and the Mercedes team, but also Hamilton and his audience. This is supported by his use of the hashtag "#TeamLH", as a collective term of address for his fanbase, used to create further engagement. Using synthetic personalisation strategies including direct address, Hamilton credits "TeamLH" as active catalysts in his success, therefore solidifying the personal

relationship he constructs between himself and his audience through social media features, working to strengthen his activist causes in the process.

It becomes clear that Hamilton approaches efforts for inclusion through a variety of ways, most directly through the explicit and public articulation of his racial justice activism, but also through inclusion of audiences within sporting processes, and through a public acknowledgment of team hierarchy. His use of the hashtag “#StillWeRise” intertextually links back to multiple levels of semiotic and multimodal elements, including Angelou’s original poem, Hamilton’s tattoo and helmet, as well as his past social media posts including repetition of this phrase in Extract 1, therefore demonstrating Hamilton’s intertextual sensibilities, and continued contributions to racial justice activism discourse.

5. Discussion

Our detailed analysis of Hamilton’s Instagram posts has shown how the combination of several multimodal discourse choices enables Hamilton to construct a Black athlete activist identity and to address issues of inclusion and exclusion. Khan (2021: 175) claims that, “when Black athletes protest today, their speech is neither purely spontaneous nor purely derivative”. Hamilton’s constructions of his Black athlete activist identity accordingly represent his sensitivities towards the use of his voice for the social inclusion of Black identities in both his sporting context and in wider society. Hamilton uses a whole set of diverse multimodal discourse and sociolinguistic features, primarily intertextuality, synthetic personalisation, and indexicality, to address a designed audience, to construct athlete activist identities for himself and members of his team, and to position himself directly as a Black athlete against racial injustice and exclusion. The analysis clearly demonstrates Hamilton’s desire to position himself as directly speaking out against racism in wider society and the exclusion of Black people in F1, evidenced through the direct indexicality of Black identity and the multiple metalinguistic strategies about race and racism, which he consistently makes the core focus of his Instagram feed throughout the 2020 F1 season and beyond.

Hamilton suggests at multiple points that his efforts are applicable to both his specific sporting contexts and to wider societies, therefore echoing scholars who emphasise the blurred lines within the sport-media-identity nexus. Hamilton further blurs the lines between sport and culture through his strategic use of intertextuality. He utilises both traditional and contemporary media (helmets, clothing, social media) and art forms (references to Angelou), highlighting the argument that sport does not exist within a vacuum, and is affected by and affects cultural processes and products. Therefore, while Coombs and Cassilo (2017) and Marston (2020) among others have analysed the athlete activism of other Black athlete activists, including Colin Kaepernick and LeBron James, Hamilton operating within the unique contexts of F1 motorsport, utilising such a wide range of discourse features for identity construction and racial justice activism, offers a distinctive set of opportunities and challenges for both scholars and practitioners, specifically as contextualised within the time frames and settings in which this study is set.

Athlete activism in F1 appears to be particularly significant for Hamilton in the two races we examined, in the sense that it makes up part of wider international efforts for social change;

Hamilton associates symbolic gestures directly with social change, therefore not only increasing the sociocultural importance of athlete activism and the sport-media-identity nexus, but also putting further value on F1 and its semiotic and media conventions. For Hamilton, his existence in such an exclusive sport appears to function as an inclusion strategy, shown by the changes he enacts within his team at the start of the 2020 season, and using his own body as a key medium. By establishing positions not only for himself within the sporting contexts of F1 as well as wider sociocultural contexts as a Black athlete activist, but also for his team members, other fellow drivers, teams, and his fans as either in opposition to or as sharing his activist values, Hamilton utilises discursive identity construction strategies in the scope of the two Grands Prix to contribute to discourses of inclusion and exclusion on multiple levels within the sport. He embeds Black identity into F1 through his own identity construction through both explicit and implicit adaptation of Black histories and indexes. He also includes BLM as a social movement in F1 contexts explicitly through the use of its slogans and logos and implicitly through voice and fight metaphors, therefore arguing against exclusion and so-called political neutrality in sport. Finally, through collective identity construction and synthetic personalisation of his audience, he includes otherwise invisible participants within the processes of F1.

Hamilton's continuous awareness, direct address, and synthetic personalisation of the viewer enables him to strengthen his activist messaging to engage his audience, supported by the consistency of the message through different modes. He uses his popularity and curates a social media presence, which continues during the season and beyond, to establish a firm position for him as an athlete activist foregrounding Black identity. Hamilton's dissemination of his activist messaging through semiotic and multimodal discursive features continues beyond the two races analysed here; whilst heavily concentrated around racial justice, he also includes environmental activism, gender equality, and LGBTQIA+ rights, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to the use of social media platforms as social inclusion tools.

Hamilton's consistent use of direct indexicality and metacommunication about the language of racial exclusion and activism shows his awareness of his social media platform in furthering causes of Black inclusion. These observations also support the argument that sport and media have a critical dialogic relationship; more specifically, they support arguments from researchers in other disciplines, including Finn (2021), in establishing the increasingly important role of mediatised motorsport in wider society. The omission of sporting performance reflections by the sport's most popular athlete also reflects the role of F1 beyond the sporting level, therefore highlighting the importance of athlete activists in burgeoning social media platforms with such significant audience reach, which is now being increasingly acknowledged by scholars and critics.

5.1 Sporting bodies, athlete activism and identity control

As highlighted above, the Instagram data analysed here has been taken from the 2020 season. In late December 2022, during the F1 off-season, and just prior to this book's publication, the ruling body of F1, the FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile) announced a ban on "the general making and display of political, religious and personal statements or comments" by professionals in F1 without prior written permission from the FIA from the 2023 season (Noble 2022). The FIA's justification for this action was cited as wanting to abide by "the principle of neutrality". The sudden inclusion of such a clause and the ambiguity of its conditions not only demonstrate the complex entanglement of the sport-media-identity nexus and socio-political messaging in F1 motorsport, but also problematise the affordances

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offered by the sport and its platforms for drivers to advocate for socio-political causes or foreground religious or personal aspects of their identities.

This controversial decision has already generated significant criticism and resistance from drivers working under the FIA, as well as journalists and fans of the sport, while Hamilton has not yet offered a comment on the matter, as of January 2023. Such a drastic decision from the FIA has real-life implications for the practitioners of Formula 1 motorsport, and this development emphasises the timely importance of this type of athlete activist research. Hamilton's prominence in F1 and his use of F1 for activism and identity construction clearly demonstrate his arguments against any claims that sport should strive to be 'politically neutral'. Hamilton instead questions and rejects the very existence of political neutrality, constructing sport more broadly, and F1 in particular, as inherently culturally and socio-politically significant in propagating the inclusion and exclusion of specific groups, e.g. the exclusion of Black people in F1 and the exclusion of Africa in the so-called World Championship. What happens next in this now potentially hostile F1 environment for Hamilton and others will be interesting to observe and assess, particularly around how much control the FIA will attempt to have around athlete activists' personal social media accounts and their behaviour within F1 contexts.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the textual and visual choices of Instagram posts can be strategically used by athlete activists online to index under-represented identities and to get political activist messages across to mass global audiences. Lewis Hamilton establishes an argumentative rhetorical style, representing himself as a Black athlete activist leader at the helm, raising awareness for racial inclusion in F1. He effectively positions himself as a leading advocate of global racial justice within an otherwise exclusive, elitist, and predominantly white sport. This study demonstrates how Black identity inclusion in F1 motorsport [can be achieved](#) by analysing [the linguistic strategies that athlete activists choose on social media platforms](#). [Through an analysis of multimodal choices](#), textual analysis of captions, and analysis of semiotic elements, [we have shown how athlete activists can](#) help advance awareness of and [act as advocates](#) for social inclusion in a sport [which is](#) notorious for its social exclusion.

We have also shown how F1 provides rich datasets for multimodal discourse analysts and sociolinguists interested in marginalised identity and activism in sports, contextualised by the limitations and affordances offered by the sport. As the extensive mediatisation of sport continues, and sports such as F1 attempt to balance the promotion of certain social and environmental causes against their arguments of political neutrality, the analyses of Hamilton's use of different social media features, images, and semiotic elements in his role as an athlete activist help establish a framework for other athlete activists, sports journalists, or media organisations, including those using online media for audience engagement, socio-political messaging, and identity construction.

This chapter ultimately contributes to an emerging body of sports discourse which demonstrates the importance of social media data in analysing the negotiation of identities and the socio-political messaging of athlete activists from under-represented communities. Athlete activism through and for previously under-represented voices, facilitated via social media

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platforms is a growing and crucial discourse type and thus provides compelling grounds for further analysis of issues of inclusion and exclusion in sport. Our findings are of practical relevance to those working within digital media, motorsport, and to sports professionals interested in activism and advocacy. Our analysis of Hamilton's use of Instagram demonstrates the value of how direct indexicality, intertextuality, and synthetic personalisation can connect with mass audiences past and present. Hamilton's posts aim to make his followers aware of historical and systemic racial injustices as a way of framing current social exclusion in F1 and across other sports.

In light of the FIA's 2023 ban of personal, religious, and political demonstrations in F1, our analyses of Hamilton as a leading Black athlete activist, advocating for social inclusion and racial justice arguably presents sports professionals with a set of useful and effective tools for subverting dominant discourses. This will be particularly useful if they are operating within restrictive sporting contexts, with a sporting body attempting to exert control over the individual voices and socio-political beliefs of participating athletes. Our analysis demonstrates how leading athlete activist identities can be successfully constructed and how wider, global audiences can be reached in their rejection of social exclusion and advocacy for social inclusion within their sporting contexts and beyond.

In overall conclusion, we believe that our study of social media in professional motorsport empirically demonstrates a set of key multimodal strategies which sports professionals can use to move away from established ritualistic social media practices about their sporting ability and successes to instead become advocates for social change and **resist** ~~against~~ discourses of political neutrality in their sporting contexts. In Hamilton's case, this is achieved through inclusion awareness-raising through his posts positioning himself as a Black athlete activist. Hamilton clearly and consistently argues for improving social inclusion within F1, in sports more generally, and also across societies in these social media posts. Indeed, these posts have operated as an important launch pad for Hamilton's shift from a highly successful F1 driver to a notable athlete activist who advocates for the eradication of social exclusion on the grounds of race and ethnicity in sport and the world.

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Transcription conventions

Italics in transcripts denote video directions and details

Data sources

Extract 1: https://www.instagram.com/tv/CCJu_I7hXqF/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Extract 2: https://www.instagram.com/p/CCReSLFBu1C/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Extract 3: https://www.instagram.com/p/CCjOzm4sfF6/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

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